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ABSTRACT

To determine what lies ahead for a school system and to be ready for it, school board members need to plan, this paper maintains. The author makes suggestions for several components of planning, including goal setting and developing priorities for facility use, staffing, programs, and services. The importance of the school district budget and policies are emphasized as tools for planning how to meet future needs. The author recommends and discusses analyzing statistics on projected enrollments, projecting revenues and expenditures, carefully developing policies and priorities, and analyzing cost/benefit, staffing, and facility budget priorities. The paper closes by recommending that systems that lack resources to gather information needed for planning hire a consultant. (JM)

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Planning: The key to tomorrow

By Phyllis R. Edelman

The changes looming for education in the next decade are foreseeable—and, as a school board member or administrator, you should be planning for them right now. Many school systems today are mired in problems of declining enrollment and funding, leading to reductions in educational programs, services, staffing, and school closings. Statistics indicate that in more than 80 percent of the states the school-age population has declined or remained stable in the last decade. But as the post-World War II baby boom generation produces its own baby boom, these statistics are expected to reverse. The number of school-age children in the U.S. by the year 2000 is expected to *increase* by 20 percent from 1980.

To determine what lies ahead for your school system and to be ready for it, you need to *plan*. That includes goal setting and developing priorities for facility use, staffing, programs, and services. Your school budget and policies should be the backbone of your school system's current planning, but they also are your tools for planning how to meet future needs. That planning includes analyzing statistics on projected enrollments, projecting revenues and expenditures, careful development of policies and priorities, and the analysis of cost/benefit, staffing, and facility budgeting studies. This information is crucial if you are to plan budget priorities—whether your enrollment will decline, grow, or remain stable in the next decade. If your school system lacks the resources to gather the information you need (many systems are in this boat), you would be well advised to hire a consultant to do the job for you.

Reliable demographic and economic data—the key word is "reliable"—has given many school boards a window to their future. In the last 10 years, enrollment in the Lakeview Public Schools in Battle Creek, Mich., has declined by nearly 2,000 to its current enrollment of 3,600. Growth, resulting from increased birth rates and industrial expansion, is anticipated in the next decade, says Supt. Paul Williams.

The Calgary Roman Catholic Separate (Public) School District #1 in Alberta has a planning department that does demographic studies and profiles of each of the school system's five areas. Using population growth patterns, the department is helping the board decide where new schools should be built.

Census data also has helped the Memphis Public Schools forecast its enrollment for the next five years. Nevertheless, school-age population statistics give school systems only a partial picture of the future. Merely because enrollment drops doesn't mean spending per pupil will increase. Looking at the past to see trends, board member Bert Prosterman notes: "From 1970 to 1980 enrollment declined by nearly 40,000 students as the budget increased by nearly $100 million. Because of inflation we're spending less per pupil than in 1970."

As enrollment drops and state funding decreases, more and more school systems learn that the budget process is more than an annual task of review and adoption by the board. Developing a sound budget today, giving forethought to future concerns, will avert later fiscal crises. To keep at least two or three years ahead of the current year's budget, the New Prairie Public School Board in New Carlisle, Ind., "works directly with the state legislature," according to Supt. Keith Powell. This liaison helps the board prepare for budget cuts before they occur and prevents crisis decision making.

In addition to state funding, local funding must be considered. Are large industries closing or moving out of your community, taking families and your tax base with them? Says Battle Creek's Supt. Williams: "The decision by the Kellogg Company to build its international headquarters here changed the picture of our planning."

Developing goals

Guidelines for your planning will not be set by your enrollment and budget projections alone, but also by your policy statements delineating your goals and objectives. Goal statements should be broad, giving direction to the administration, but allowing flexibility should projections not materialize. Goals also should be positive in outlook. Among the goals established by the Harrison District No. 2 in Colorado Springs, are:

- To ensure every student opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes deemed basic at each grade level.
- To ensure systematic and quality recruitment, selection, and appointment procedures for personnel.
- To ensure the efficient use of monetary and material resources.

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Selecting priorities

No school system now or in the future is expected to have unlimited revenues, so goals and objectives cannot be fulfilled unless priorities are established. Priorities may change as the enrollment and budget forecasts change, but citizen involvement is an important part of the priority development formula. Board policy on community involvement in decision making may substantiate that involvement, calling for the development of citizen advisory committees, surveys, and public hearings on sensitive issues—all of this, let us stress, managed by somebody who knows what he or she is doing.

To develop school facility priorities, the Memphis board formed a 39-member task force representing board members, parents, students, administrators, and teachers to help establish guidelines for closing schools. These guidelines would serve any school system that is devising priorities for determining school closings. Among the considerations are the structure and maintenance needed for the building; costs for transporting students to the schools; current and anticipated enrollment; classroom use, and the contribution the school makes to the cohesiveness and stability of the community.

Community involvement did not end with the recommendations of the Memphis task force. Community hearings were held in all the schools recommended for closing, and, says board member Prosterman: "We knew people were going to be upset. These hearings were all part of our plan to allow the community the opportunity to express its feelings. The public also was involved in the process of deciding how to use the schools after they were closed."

Whether the future holds growth or decline for the schools, board policies should ensure preparation for both eventualities. With seven schools opened in the last two years along the growing outer perimeter of the city, the Calgary board's policy manual includes a statement on facilities planning. At the same time, Douglas Taylor, associate superintendent for administration says, "declining enrollment in the central core of the city necessitated board adoption of a school closing policy."

Development of facility priorities and policies is only one of at least four areas the board should examine to devise a picture for meeting the school system's future needs. Staff, programs, and services are equally vital concerns of school leaders if they are to face the future on sound footing.

Staff priorities

One aspect of determining staff priorities requires boards to review pupil/teacher ratios. School closings and budget declines have led to staff reductions and increased pupil/teacher ratios. Deciding what you would like your pupil/teacher ratio to be—if that becomes your ironclad priority—will force other cuts to fall into line. But nothing is forever, if you plan well—with budgetary constraints, the Memphis schools increased its pupil/teacher ratio. But with additional funding becoming available, plans are being made to reduce class sizes.

Boards that are reducing staff must have a reduction-in-force policy statement that outlines criteria for layoffs unless master agreements with teacher negotiating organizations already stipulate the process. With a ten-year enrollment decline, the Lakeview Public Schools 260-member teaching staff decreased by nearly 100. Supt. Williams says this was handled "mainly through attrition and retirement, although there were some layoffs. We tried to limit our reduction-in-force to those teachers with unsatisfactory performance ratings."

Growing school systems are faced with other personnel policy needs including reassignment and transfer. Says Chuck Hewins, administrative assistant to the superintendent of the Harrison School District: "You don't hire a whole new staff when you open a new building. You hire some new teachers, but you transfer some teachers from other schools. And not all teachers want to be transferred."

The Calgary board policy allows any teacher within the system to apply for a transfer to any new school. Board approved regulations, however, make no guarantees that the teacher's request can be fulfilled.

Boards also must determine if administrative and supervisory staffing is adequate for overseeing the management and organization of the school system. A review of your pupil/administrator ratio and a comparison of your school system's administrator and supervisory staffing patterns with school systems of similar size within your area will provide some data upon which to base priorities. Your board also should review the number of people reporting to each noninstructional or noncertificated supervisor and the requirements in each job description for supervisory and administrative personnel.

A careful review of job descriptions provides a perspective of what each person is doing and how essential the performance of that person's tasks is in fulfilling the needs of the school system. The review also may indicate which administrators are performing tasks beyond the minimum needed to support your educational programs and services. This can be especially important to school systems coping with decline (administrative and supervisory personnel should not be immune to staff reductions). Administrator cuts in the Lakeview schools forced "some administrators to wear two hats," says Supt.

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Williams. The curriculum coordinator also serves as an elementary school principal. In some systems, one principal serves two elementary schools.

Annualizing administrator salaries on a daily basis will provide comparative data for reviewing the daily cost of each individual assigned to different administrative tasks, and will offer the board additional information to weigh in developing staffing priorities.

By computing salaries on the contractual days employed, a principal who works for 200 days at $30,000 per year receives an annualized daily salary of $150. A director of instruction employed for 220 days per year at $30,000 annually receives a daily rate of $136. A guidance counselor employed on a 180-day teacher contract and earning $28,000 has an annualized daily salary of $155. The salaries paid for these positions may not reflect each position's value to the school system.

An evaluation of the administrative staff positions in the Memphis school system resulted in layoffs for some administrators and raises for principals, whose value to the system in board member Prosterman's words is "tremendous."

Program and service needs

Choosing facility and staffing priorities may cause boards their biggest headaches, but the most important priorities to determine are those for programs and services. Often, once the hard choices that establish these priorities are made, the board can rather easily determine the school system's facility and staffing needs.

The board's first task is to ensure continuance of a minimum program that meets state standards and community needs, before funding of additional programs is determined. A policy on the basic instructional program, which outlines those skills—language arts, mathematics, social studies—necessary for a student to develop critical thinking reinforces this basic program.

Cost/benefit studies of special programs—vocational, adult, and arts education—may require board analysis before decisions are made to add, cut, or expand a program. Given budgetary constraints, the Memphis board cut a music program, only to make plans to reinstate it with the passage of a recent sales tax levy.

Budget cuts often are synonymous with instructional cuts because 70 to 90 percent of the total school system budget falls in the instructional category. *This need not always be the case.* The New Prairie School Board in New Carlisle, Ind., *did* cut the German language program in the high school because of budget cuts, but says Supt. Powell, "the junior high curriculum was revamped and other curricular programs were upgraded."

Noninstructional costs, including transportation, food services, and the business office functions may be 20 to 30 percent of a school system's budget, and these certainly require critical scrutiny when the board is determining school system priorities.

Transportation always is a concern when boards consider closing neighborhood schools. The cost of transporting students to other schools sometimes offsets the savings realized in closing a neighborhood school. More efficient bus routing, as the New Prairie board learned, can cut some transportation expenses. This rural school system annually reviews its bus routes, and has managed to cut one or two every year. For a city school system like Memphis, eliminating all transportation services except those required by court order, contributed toward cutting its budget.

Smart spending

The same critical look a board must take at its priorities to manage current decline must be extended to planning for growth. Programs, services, staffing, and facilities must be studied with an eye toward community desires, student needs, and budgetary constraints. These components and their related costs also must be viewed as integrated working units if boards are to have a full picture of how to set priorities for spending taxpayer money.

Your instructional program and all its related costs comprise one working unit of your school system. To determine these costs, compile your teacher's salaries, school supplies and materials, and the other elements that make up your instructional program.

The other part of your priority and expense picture are the elements and costs that make up your noninstructional program. Noninstructional costs include your administrative and supervisory salaries, transportation, food services, maintenance and energy. Together, the instructional and noninstructional units comprise your entire program and its budget. These compilations allow you to see where your money is being spent and whether it's in keeping with your priorities.

School profiles, which list both instructional and noninstructional costs, student enrollment, facility use, pupil/teacher, and pupil/administrator ratios and other comparative data can give your board more statistical data on which to base the development of realistic priorities. A school profile shows how resources in each of your system's schools are being used, and which schools use their resources most effectively and efficiently. This can be valuable information in deciding school closing priorities, or in planning for a new school's efficient use.

Learning the art of handling declining budgets today may be good training for tomorrow when, increased enrollment notwithstanding, education dollars may continue to be scarce. Studies indicate that other age groups—including a growing over-65 population—and other government functions including transportation and social services will be competing with education for state and local dollars. In the words of Supt. Powell of New Prairie, Ind., today's dollar competition has "taught us to spend our money smarter." Smart spending and sound planning, reflected in board budgets, policies, and priorities also will be the key to steady and effective board leadership in the future.

All of which is easily enough said. Sophisticated planning and analysis are essential to turning wishes into reality. Reliable consulting help is available from your National School Boards Association and from many of the state and provincial school boards associations. Information from NSBA is yours for the asking. ■

Policy Adviser

Your priorities are supported by the policies you develop to manage decline or growth. To be prepared for either of these circumstances, listed below are the categories in which you should have statements. Those with an asterisk are included in the school administrator's copy of this month's *Updating*.

Goals and objectives policies:
AE, School District Goals and Objectives
CA, Administration Goals
*DA, Fiscal Management Goals
EA, Support Services Goals
FA, Facilities Development Goals
GA, Personnel Policies Goals
IA, Instructional Goals

Fiscal management policies:
DB, Annual Budget
*DBD, Budget Planning
DBE, Determination of Budget Priorities
DBG, Budget Hearings and Reviews
DE, Revenues from Tax Sources
DN, School Properties Disposal Procedure

Public involvement policies:
ABA, Community Involvement in Decisionmaking
ABC, Student Involvement in Decisionmaking
BCF, Advisory Committees to the Board
KBA, Public's Right to Know

Program policies:
IE, Organization of Instruction
IGA, Basic Instructional Program, and all related subcodes
*IHB, Class Size
IIA, Instructional Materials
JC, School Attendance Areas
JD, School Census

Service policies:
EC, Buildings and Grounds Management
ED, Materials Resource Management
EE, Transportation Services Management
EEA, Student Transportation Services
EEAB, School Bus Scheduling and Routing
EEAD, Special Use of School Buses
EF, Food Services Management
EFA, Food Purchasing
EG, Office Services Management

Facility policies:
FB, Facilities Planning
FC, Facilities Capitalization Program
FEC, Facilities Development Plans and Specifications
FJ, Temporary School Facilities
FK, Facilities Renovations
*FL, Retirement of Facilities

Personnel policies:
GBA, Equal Opportunity Employment
GCA, Professional Staff Positions (see note below)
GCB, Professional Staff Contracts and Compensation Plans
GCBA, Professional Staff Salary Schedules
GCC, Professional Staff Recruiting
GCD, Professional Staff Hiring
GCE, Part-time and Professional Staff Employment
GCH, Professional Staff Seniority
*GCI, Professional Staff Assignments and Transfers
GCM, Supervision of Professional Staff
*GCPA, Reduction in Professional Staff Work Force
GCPC, Retirement of Professional Staff Members

Note: Statements in each of these GC categories also should be developed for the support staff. In accordance with the EPS/NSBA policy classification system, policies for these staff members correspond to those shown but their coding series begins with the letters GD rather than GC. For example: GDA, Support Staff Positions. ■

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